

I Promise, I'll Do Better by Lilyauden

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Multi

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Owens (Stranger Things), Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Families - Relationship, Father/Daughter - Relationship, Friends - Relationship

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Summary:

After losing Sara, Hopper felt like he would never be happy again; never thought he would ever have a child again, let alone a daughter. Where he was once a happily married guy with a beautiful child that he loved with all his heart, he was now a divorced, bitter and cynical man who drank too much, smoked too much, and was addicted to anti-anxiety drugs. Nothing more than a shadow of who he used to be.

But then the incident of Will Byers' disappearance and the resulting connection to Hawkins Lab and the young girl treated as a human experiment that they had been keeping locked away in the basement, changed his life forever.

Now, after taking in that same young girl and caring for her like a child of his own for nearly a year, he finds himself holding a piece of paper with the name 'Jane Hopper' in small, printed black letters.

Whether or not he feels that he deserves a second chance, Hopper is going to do whatever it takes to keep his second daughter safe... and alive.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

This is a short(ish) story about the adoptive familial relationship between Jim Hopper and Eleven (now Jane Hopper) and about the father/daughter bond that they've developed and how that affects the relationships that they have with other people. It begins after the events of season 2, but there will be multiple flashbacks during the course of the story.

I personally loved the relationship 'team-up' of Hopper and Elle. It was one of my favorite things about season 2 and I can't wait to see how it will continue to evolve and develop.

The title was inspired by the Sleeping At Last song 'Light'.

"I'll give you everything I have, I'll teach you everything I know

I promise, I'll do better

I will always hold you close, but I will learn to let you go

I promise, I'll do better

I will soften every edge, I'll hold the world to it's best

And I'll do better

With every heartbeat I have left, I will defend your every breath

And I'll do better"

"So, you let her come after all."

Hopper glances over at Joyce. Her sweet smile and approving eyes warm his heart.

They're leaning against her car, waiting outside the school while the kids are inside enjoying their school's annual Snow Ball dance.

Trying (and failing) to contain a smile, he shrugs. "Yeah."

He drops his cigarette and puts it out with his boot.

"Figured after everything she's been through, she deserves to have at least one night out in the world with her friends, acting like a normal kid."

Now Joyce's expression looks more concerned.

"You're not going to keep her away from the boys for another entire year, are you?"

"No." He shakes his head. " I'm not gonna do that to her again, but we're still gonna have to be careful. Owens says we shouldn't push our luck, and I gotta agree with him on that. "

Choosing not to argue, Joyce holds her tongue, but her continued suspicion of Dr. Owens is all too obvious. She knows that Hopper has a way of scaring people enough to make them think twice about how much they value their own safety before ever betraying him, but that doesn't stop her from worrying.

"You really trust him?"

Joyce's voice has that tone of anxious concern that Hopper has come to instantly recognize.

"To an extent."

After hesitating for a brief moment, Hopper reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out the folded envelope that he's been keeping hidden there for the past several days. He's been too nervous to show it to El yet, or to even tell her about it. But right now, he wants Joyce to see it. He wants to know what she thinks; wants to know if she believes that he's capable of doing this, or if he's completely lost his mind.

Without saying anything, he hands it to her, surprised by how reluctant he is to let go of it; the document in that envelope has become as precious to him as anything he owns.

"What's this?" Joyce asks, slightly confused.

"Open it."

Seeming to sense Hopper's nervousness, Joyce gently opens the envelope and pulls out the forged birth certificate that Dr. Owens made for him last week.

She silently studies it for what seems like ages, but in reality was probably nothing more than a minute or two.

Hopper stubbornly refuses to show her how anxious he is to hear what she thinks, but his stomach is in knots.

But when Joyce looks up at him, she's smiling. It's the most genuinely happy smile he's seen from her ever since Bob's death.

"Oh, Hop." she sighs. "It's perfect."

He smiles, his chest swelling up and his stomach knots fading away.

"This is wonderful," Joyce glances back down at the certificate. "Jane Hopper." she reads out loud.

Hearing someone else say those words sends Hopper's heart fluttering.

Jane Hopper.

It's official now. On paper, Hopper is the biological father of Eleven. Dr. Owens thought it was safest that way, just in case any questions were asked.

"How did you...?"

"Owens. He made it for me. It's as good as any forgery out there."

Putting the certificate back into the envelope, Joyce hands it back to Hopper. "Well, congratulations."

Hopper tucks the envelope back into his pocket, glad to have it back in his possession. "You don't think I'm crazy for doing this, do you?"

"No... well maybe a little crazy." she teases.

Hopper chuckles, glad to see Joyce showing some life and humor again.

Then Joyce reaches out and grabs hold of his hand, squeezing it firmly. "But you're going to be a great dad."

Hopper studies her face for a moment. "You really think so?"

The concern in his voice makes Joyce smile at him reassuringly. "I don't think there's anyone in the world that loves that little girl as much as you do."

"Don't let Mike hear you, he'd heavily argue with that."

"That's different." Joyce playfully hits his arm.

They sit in silence for a little while longer, then Joyce turns to face him again.

"She loves you too, you know. She loves you so much."

Hopper doesn't smile, but instead looks sadly hopeful. "How can you tell?"

"It's easy to see from the outside, but just be patient with yourself. You'll see it in time."

Later that night, when the dance starts to wind down and the kids start to make their way out of the auditorium, Joyce has one last bit of advice for Hopper.

"Tell her. Tell El about it. If not tonight, then soon. She'll want to know."

Squeezing Hopper's hand one last time, just before the kids are within earshot, she reassures him. "She'll be so happy."

As soon as Joyce releases Hopper's hand, he finds it's become occupied by a much smaller one.

"Ready to go home, kid?" he asks, his voice soft and warm with affection.

Eleven looks up at him, her eyes sparkling and a loving smile on her face, and his heart melts.

"Yes. Ready to go home."

2. Chapter 2

By the time Hopper and El make it back to the cabin, she is fast asleep.

The dance has clearly worn her out, but the peaceful look on her face is well worth the risk of letting her spend a night out in the world, despite Dr. Owens' worries. Hell, Hopper had been worried.

He can't help it. No matter how many times he's been proven to be over-cautious or how often El shows another incredible side to her ever-growing abilities, he worries about her; worries about her safety, worries that she'll be found out, worries that she'll be taken away from him, worries that he'll lose her.

Like he lost Sara.

It always takes him aback a little, how much the thought of losing El terrifies him. For the longest time, he never thought he would have someone in his life that meant that much to him. And now that he does, all he can think about is protecting her and keeping her safe.

But he knows that he can't control her like he did. He can't keep her locked up in that cabin, like a prisoner. He can't keep her away from her friends. She needs to have something resembling a normal life until Hopper can make his adoption of El official and openly claim her as his daughter. But they need to hang tight for one more year.

Just one more year.

But after everything they've been through together in the last few months, Hopper feels like he can make this work, and make things better for the both of them. He's had to relearn a lot about being a parent, and he'll have to continue to figure out how to be a parent to a teenager.

For the first time in a long time, he feels confident that he can do it, that he can hopefully do right by El.

Hearing her shuffling in her sleep grabs Hopper's attention, pulling

him away from the thoughts in his head.

He quietly gets out of the car and walks over to the passenger side, slowly opening the door, so as to not wake her.

He reaches over her, unbuckles her seat belt, and gently scoops her up in his arms.

After Eleven managed to close the gate to the Upside Down, she collapsed to the ground. Luckily, Hopper had been watching and had quick enough reflexes to reach out and grab her before she managed to hit the hard metal lift and slowly sank to his knees, holding her slim, fragile frame against his broad chest.

Despite the unbelievably immense power that she had just shown, El felt like a limp rag doll in Hopper's arms.

For the briefest moment, Hopper felt his chest tighten with fear. Had it been too much? Had he just lost her too?

Then, he felt El wrap her thin arms around his shoulders, her small fists clenching his coat tightly.

He let out a heavy breath, relief flooding through him, washing away his fear and worries in a heartbeat. He held her even tighter, never wanting to let go.

"You did good, kid." he reassured her; his voice, thick with emotion, catching in his throat. "You did so good."

Kissing her cheek, he hoped she knew that he had never felt more proud of anyone.

They sat there in silence for several minutes, catching their breath.

Once they made their way back up the lift, Hopper carried El through the lab and out to the truck, her head resting against his shoulder, her body curled against his chest.

"Thank you."

Hopper looks down at El's face as her eyes open just a sliver. She's looking up at him.

"For what, kid?"

The next words she manages to whisper are so quiet that he can barely hear them.

"For letting me go."

Hopper smiles. *I promise, kid. I'll learn to do better. For you, I will be better.*

And that's a promise he plans on keeping.

Notes for the Chapter:

This is a shorter chapter, but thank you for reading. I'll be trying my best to come out with more chapters soon. As always, thoughts and advice are more than welcome.

Author's Note:

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you liked it. I'll try my best to keep a steady pace with the writing and continue to provide content for you to read. Let me know what you think in the comments section. Advice and/or feedback is always appreciated.